#### **Juvenile Justice Teams**

# What are juvenile justice teams?

Juvenile justice teams are an alternative way to handle young people who have committed offences or may be in the early stages of offending. The teams ask that young people take responsibility for their actions. They encourage young people to face up to problems and divert them from the courts.

Young people are sent to the teams by the police or the Children's Court. More serious offences are usually handled by the courts.

To be accepted by a juvenile justice team, a young person must agree they have done something wrong and must be prepared to make amends (put things right).

Within the team process, all participants work out a contract – known as an action plan – for the young person. If he or she does the right thing and follows the plan, they do not get a criminal record.

## Who is involved in the teams?

The juvenile justice teams are a multi-agency program. Professional team support comes from a juvenile justice staff member, a police officer and, where appropriate, cultural and ethnic group representatives and an education officer.

The Department of Corrective Services believes an important part of growing up is learning to become a responsible citizen by caring for others and the community.

Responsible citizenship grows in the family. Even when a young person comes into contact with the justice system, parents still have primary responsibility for their child and the way they grow up.

The teams involve the young person who committed the offence, their parents and the victim. Together they address the crime, and how it affects people, in a bid to get the young person back on track.

Parents, along with the victim, play an important role in the young person facing up to the consequences of their actions

### **Juvenile Justice Teams - continued**

#### How does it work?

When a matter has been sent to a juvenile justice team, contact is made with the young person who offended, their family and the victim of the crime.

The teams usually call a family meeting with the young person and his or her family, along with the victim. The victim is given the opportunity of being involved, but they don't have to. If they do wish to be involved they may do so in person or by writing a letter making their views known.

Victims can help decide how the young person can put things right and be involved in drawing up an action plan. This is a voluntary arrangement which must be agreed to by all participants at the family meeting.

The family meeting is properly organised but is not like a court. In addition to police and juvenile justice staff, other people may be involved – perhaps representatives from school or an Aboriginal community.

The family meeting can work out the best way to deal with the young person and the offence. But if the family meeting doesn't result in agreement, the young person may be sent back to the referring source, ie police or Children's Court, for further action.

## Why does it work?

The juvenile justice teams' approach helps young people face the victims of their crimes and the consequences of their actions. It also allows the young person to look at the reasons for their offending behaviour and to do something about it. It shows that crime harms people.

For example, someone who has stolen DVDs, CDs or a computer from a house may come face-to-face with the people who live in the house and who have been hurt by the thefts. Part of this involves explaining the reasons for their behaviour and taking steps to make sure it doesn't happen again.

The process involves the young person's family, so parents can help their son or daughter not to reoffend. If parents are not available, then another responsible adult must be present and willing to participate in the team process.

The teams will want to talk to parents about ways they can stop their child from breaking the law and what help they may need. Families are involved in all decisions and, along with victims, have a right to be told what is happening.

A young person may choose to pull out of the team process at any time and ask to be sent back to the Children's Court or police. However, experience shows that the team process works well for most people. The juvenile justice teams will hold a young person accountable – in a very direct way – for what they have done.



#### **Juvenile Justice Teams - continued**

## Making amends and addressing problems

After talking about the offence, a young person can be asked to make amends to set things right. He or she may have to apologise, help repair or replace anything broken or lost, or provide some form of compensation to the victim.

The young person may be asked to work for the victim or for an organisation or community group. The young person may also have conditions set by their own family, such as not mixing with certain people.

It is expected that the young person will address the issues contributing to their offending to reduce the possibility of reoffending.

If the young person doesn't do what has been agreed and has no acceptable reason, they will be sent back to the Children's Court to be dealt with.

# Why you should get involved

If you are a young person, then taking responsibility for your actions in a direct and supportive process can teach you some tough but valuable lessons, and save you from a formal criminal record.

For families and victims of young people who have offended, involvement in the teams can give you a voice and recognition of your roles beyond basic caregiver or crime statistic.

This process can sometimes help a victim express their anger and deal with the emotional strains of a crime. It allows them to have a say about the consequences of the act and a chance to find closure and put the matter behind them.

Similarly, it allows the young person to realise the consequences of their actions on real people – the victims and their families, and also on themselves and their own family.

The process gives all involved a chance to change the young person's future behaviour.